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ABSTRACT

The study compared knowledge of special education laws, policies, and procedures of various groups of 87 elementary and 33 middle school teachers (N=120). Ss were categorized by years of teaching experience, grade levels taught, subjects taught, and sources of information about P.L. 94-142, the Education For All Handicapped Children Act. An instrument was developed and field tested to measure each subject's factual knowledge of P.L. 94-142. Analysis of results revealed that both elementary and middle school teachers showed similar degrees of knowledge of P.L. 94-142. They were knowledgeable in special education laws and policies in slightly over half the facts presented in seven competency areas, regardless of number of years' teaching experience, levels of teaching, subjects taught, or sources of knowledge. As predicted, most teachers missed the items involving transportation and the components of the individual education program. The 30-item questionnaire is attached. (CL)

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TEACHER KNOWLEDGE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION LAW P.L. 94 - 142: ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL

by

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Introduction

Mainstreaming, unlike other recent educational programs such as "Head Start", "Modern Math", or career education, is mandated by a federal law (Boyle, 1981). Also known as The Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, P.L. 94-142 reflects a movement designed to provide handicapped children and their parents with legal safeguards to a free, appropriate education. This landmark legislation evolved as a result of several social forces: 1. extension of the basic philosophy of the Civil Rights Movement; 2. educational research on individualization; 3. parent pressure groups; and 4. a series of litigation and legislative proceedings.

Within this climate, P.L. 94-142 created new guidelines and objectives under which all school personnel must function. Both regular and special education personnel needed to assume new professional roles and resonsibilities in order to successfully implement mainstreaming. For example, classroom teachers in regular schools must contribute significant amounts of time and energy to the development, implementation, and evaluation of each IEP (Hasazi, 1979). In addition, teachers need to provide factual information to parents of handicapped and non-handicapped children concerning mainstreaming.

Because of the anticipated impact on all levels and aspects of education across the nation, inservice training was mandated within this federal law:

> To assist local districts in locating, identifying, and educating handicapped students, the federal government has required that a portion of the funds appropriated to the states as a result of P.L. 94-142 be allocated specifically for inservice training of administrators and teachers in local school districts (Hasazi, 1979: 12).

Consequently, state departments of education, teacher education institutions, and local education agencies have modified their programs to comply with the principles of P.L. 94-142 (Clair, 1979).

Although a great deal of inservice activity has been generated, Boyle (1981: 81) states that little investigation into the nature of the activity has occurred. It is evident that evaluations are needed to assess the qualitative and quantitative aspects of special education inservice preparation. This study focuses on the degree of

teacher knowledge of seven competency areas within P.L. 94-142 among elementary and middle school teachers. The researcher attempted to determine differences in teacher knowledge in relation to Years of Teaching Experience; Levels Taught (K-2, 3-5, 6-8) ; Subjects Taught; and Enrollment vs. Non-enrollment in Special Education Courses.

Review of Literature

Section 613 (a) (3) of P.L. 94-142 clearly requires state plans for special education to include a " comprehensive system of personnel development " (Harris, 1980: 197). A partial list pertaining to inservice training includes the following statements:

1) Identify the areas in which training is needed, such as IEP, LRE, assessment, and procedural safeguards.
2) Describe the content and nature of training for each area identified. (Boardman, 1980: v.)

" Enforcement of P.L. 94-142 is tied to federal monitoring, and economic sanctions will be the primary tool " (Kendall, 1978). State plans of inservice education on both the college and local school system levels must provide opportunities for educators to develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes for effective and legal implementations. The rules and regulations for teacher training under the 1975 Act for handicapped children offer descriptors which form the basis for the content of inservice programs or courses (Harris, 1980). Competency lists have been developed to delineate categories of knowledge and skills. Six general areas of knowledge have been identified:

1. Laws regarding the handicapped
2. Handicapping conditions
3. Terminology and definitions of P.L. 94-142
4. Appropriate instructional settings for the handicapped
5. Child evaluation procedures
6. Procedural safeguards. (Haisley, 1978: 31)

Rubin (1978: 186) states, " while their priorities may differ, the goals of most programs are to provide information about 1. the law;

2. understanding the legal system; and 3. problem-solving and analytical skills. "

An important area of inquiry has been suggested: " What are teachers actually getting out of programs that are in existence ? " (Boyle, 1981: 80). Investigations seem to indicate that a wide range of regular classroom teachers rate themselves as needing improvement in ability to adequately work within the area of mainstreaming (Crisci, 1981). Gickling and Theobold (1975) found that 85% of regular classroom teachers felt they were inadequately skilled for working with mainstreamed students. Haisley (1978) comments, " Perhaps the area in which education personnel are least knowledgeable and skilled is the legal provisions established by P.L. 94-142. Teacher surveys conducted in recent years (1977 - 1981) indicate "Knowledge of laws related to handicapped students" as the highest content priority of inservice education " (Bass, 1981: 3). A study in 1978 by Alexander and Strain, and another in 1979 by Johnson and Cartwright, examined the degree of competency by regular educators. They concluded " that classroom teachers are often ill-prepared to teach handicapped children " (Johnson, 1980: 10). Analysis of responses from interviews with teachers enrolled in mainstreaming inservice courses indicated " Teach/Gain Information About P.L. 94-142 " as the third ranking need (Boyle, 1981: 83). In a recent study, Warger (1983: 7) states, " Regular elementary teachers generally are already prepared to implement mainstreaming ". At higher levels, limitations through curricula and school goals and objectives hinder the instruction of mainstreamed students to a greater extent.

The National Support System Project (1980) concluded, " It can be stated with confidence that the goals of P.L. 94-142 will be realized only if the quality of teacher preparation and professional services in the schools can be improved. " Although much has been written on myriad aspects of mainstreaming, little research has attended to specific competencies needed to successfully implement the concept (Crisci, 1981). In a Phi Delta Kappa fastback on mainstreaming, Hasazi (1979) summarizes,

> An important research priopity must be given to teacher training at both the preservice and inservice levels. ...

> While work has begun in this area, we must push ahead as quickly as possible with sound evaluative research on this important topic.

Relevant studies and recent literature indicate the need to assess the degree of teacher knowledge and preparation concerning P.L. 94-142.

Method

This study compared teacher knowledge of special education laws, policies, and procedures of various groups categorized by: years of teaching experience; grade levels taught; subjects taught; or sources of information about P.L. 94-142. The research sample consisted of teachers enrolled in graduate school at Towson State University, located in a metropolitan area of Maryland. The sample of 87 elementary and 33 middle school teachers represented private, parochial, and public school systems.

To assess each participant's factual knowledge of P.L. 94-142, a thirty question affective inventory was developed. Four sources were utilized in the development of the instrument: 1. Introducing Public Law 94-142 The Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975; 2. Maryland Programs For Handicapped Children, Bylaw 13.04.01; 3. Special Education and You - The General Education Teacher; and 4. University faculty members who taught special education courses. Fifty statements compiled from the four sources were placed into one of seven competency headings. These were rewritten as fifteen true/false and fifteen multiple choice test items. The item distribution by subject heading is:

1. Legal Background - Items 1 - 4
2. Handicapping Conditions - Items 5, 18, 19
3. Referral - Items 16, 17
4. ARD - Items 6, 8, 20, 21, 22
5. IEP - Items 9, 10, 23, 24
6. Levels of Service - Items 7, 11, 12, 25, 26, 27, 28
7. Parent's Rights - Items 13, 14, 15, 29, 30.

Four levels of questioning (memory, interpretation, application, and analysis) were formulated using the context of each item.

A matrix of objectives and content was prepared. To maximize the validity of the test, easier questions were arranged first with the more difficult ones last. Demographic data were collected concerning: years of teaching experience; grade levels taught; subject areas taught; and teachers' major sources of special education knowledge.

A pilot study was conducted in June 1984 using a graduate school class of thirteen members. Following the pilot study, five university professors with expertise in either mainstreaming, school law, or educational research were requested to evaluate the instrument by addressing these factors: 1. Type of test; 2. Length of test; 3. Appropriateness and inclusiveness of topics to teacher knowledge; 5. Clarity of questions and choice of responses; and 6. Accuracy of responses. Modifications, such as the conversion of the true/false items to a mulitple choice format, were made in accordance with the professors' suggestions. These content validation measures support the use of this instrument to assess teacher knowledge of P.L. 94-142.

The descriptive sheet and revised tests were distributed to 120 graduate students early in fall semester 1984 using the clustering sample approach. Each participant's identification number, the corresponding demographic data, and the individual test item responses were coded and recorded on IBM sheets for computer processing. An analysis of the difference between one dependent variable (teacher knowledge) and four independent variables (years of teaching experience; levels of teaching; subjects taught; and sources of knowledge) was made. Descriptive statistics, including item analysis and the distribution of correct responses, were compiled through computer data. The analysis of variance, specically the ANOVA Program from SPSS^{X} User's Guide was employed as the inferential statistic.

Results

The analysis of variance yielded several F scores which showed differences between the four independent variables and the individual raw scores. A second analysis of variance compared the subscores of test items within the seven competency categories with

each independent variable in order to discover any significant difference.

Table 1

COMPARISON OF TEACHER PERFORMANCE CATEGORIZED BY THE FOUR INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Scale	Years Experience	Subjects	Grade Level	Sources of Information	Sig.
Law	1.43	.93	.91	.53	NS
Handicap Cond.	2.17	3.00	.38	1.93	NS
ARD	.56	.31	1.89	.04	NS
Levels of Service	.96	.92	.187	.01	NS
IEP	.10	.164	.482	4.03*	*.05
Identification	2.84	.46	.291	.137	NS
Parent Rights	5.77*	.156	4.68*	1.76	*.004 (Yr.) *.01 (Gr.)
Total Score	1.41	.003	2.09	.995	NS

Note: Tabled values are one way Analysis of Variance F Ratios.

In comparing Teacher Performance on Total Test (Total Score) with the four independent variables, the years of teaching experience (0 - 5) (6 - 10) (11 - 20); the levels of teaching (K - 2) (3 - 5) (6 - 8); subjects taught; and sources of knowledge (formal courses vs. no coursework), there was no significant difference at the .05 level. Twenty-eight F Ratios resulted from the comparison of Teacher Performance in the Seven Competency Areas and the four variables. Only three were of significance within the .05 level:

1. Teacher Performance in the IEP Competency Area and Sources of Knowledge - Sig. = .05

2. Teacher Performance in the Parent's Rights Competency Area and Years of Teaching Experience - Sig. = .004
3. Teacher Performance in the Parent's Rights Competency Area and Grade Level of Teaching - Sig. = .01.

Table 2

TOTAL SCORE DISTRIBUTION OF ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS

Score	Elementary Teachers	Middle School Teachers	% of Sample Population
27 - 30	0	0	0
26	0	1	.8
25	1	0	.8
24	4	0	3
23	4	1	4
22	6	4	8
21	9	3	10
20	10	6	13
19	4	2	5
18	7	5	5
17	4	2	5
16	8	2	8
15	7	2	7
14	7	3	8
13	7	0	6
12	4	1	4
11	3	1	3
10	1	0	.8
9	0	0	0
8	1	0	.8
0 - 7	0	0	0
	87	33	

Both elementary and middle school teachers showed similar degrees of knowledge of P.L. 94-142. Based on a maximum score of 30, measures of central tendency were determined: 1. mean = 17.6; 2. median = 18; 3. mode = 20; and 4. standard deviation = 3.8. Of the eighty-seven elementary teachers participating, 52 percent scored 17.6 or higher. When considering the thirty-three middle school teachers, 64 percent scored 17.6 percent or higher. Although a larger percentage of the middle school teachers scored 17.6 or higher, the difference was unremarkable. The range of scores was 18, with the highest score of 26 achieved by only one

participant and the lowest score of 8 also achieved by only one participant. The KR21 (alpha) is .65, indicating the reliability of the test. Most scores cluster around the mean as is expected in a normal distribution. Raw scores clustering around the mean represents 49% of the participants.

Table 3

PER CENT OF ACCURACY OF EACH TEST ITEM

Item Number	Competency Category	Basic Content	Per Cent of Accuracy
1	Law	Sp. Ed. Definition	91
2	Law	Purpose of P.L. 94-142	26
3	Law	Ages Served	18
4	Law	LRE Definition	91
5	Hand. Cond.	Sp. Ed. Services	71
6	ARD	Definition	33
7	Level of Serv.	Hearing, Speech, Vis. Imp.	31
8	ARD	Members of Team	96
9	IEP	Definition	77
10	IEP	Time Review	53
11	Levels of Serv.	Levels III and IV	43
12	Levels of Serv.	Level I	66
13	Parent Rts.	MAUDD	71
14	Parent Rts.	Parent Signature	75
15	Parent Rts.	Rights	83
16	Referral	Personnel	92
17	Referral	Child Find	32
18	Hand. Cond.	Learning Disability	39
19	Hand. Cond.	Intellectually Limited	62
20	ARD	Committee Responsibilities	73
21	ARD	Assessments	81
22	ARD	Transportation	10
23	IEP	Component Parts	8
24	IEP	Implementation	55
25	Level of Services	Level II	53
26	Level of Services	Level VI	61
27	Level of Services	Level VII	92
28	Level of Services	Level V	52
29	Parent's Rts.	Parent Participation	48
30	Parent's Rts.	Due Process	85

The item analysis shows that twenty of the thirty items were facts known by 52 - 96 percent of the sample population. In contrast, ten items were known by only 8 - 48 percent of the sample population. In each of the seven Competency Categories,

no obvious skewness of percentages within each of the seven areas was evident. This means that most participants knew approximately 50 percent of the facts presented in each category. The three items missed most include:

1. Components of IEP - 8 percent accuracy
2. Transportation - 10 percent accuracy
3. Ages of Children Covered by P.L. 94-142 - 18 percent accuracy.

Discussion

This study has shown that the sample population of the elementary and middle school teachers attending Graduate School at Towson State University are knowledgeable in special education laws and policies in slightly over half the facts presented in seven competency areas. This fact holds true regardless of the number of years teaching experience; levels of teaching; subjects taught; or sources of knowledge. The findings were consistent with the researcher's expectations. Both sets of teachers who completed formal courses in special education performed better than those who did not. Both elementary and middle school teachers with less teaching experience performed as well as those with more experience. As predicted by a University special education instructor and the trend of the pilot study, most teachers missed the items involving "transportation" and "the components of IEP".

Certain limitations should be considered when interpreting the results and conclusions of this study. The sample was relatively small in number and was limited to graduate students of five selected professors during Fall Semester 1984. The ratio of the one hundred twenty elementary and middle school teachers was eighty-seven to thirty-three, an uneven distribution for meaningful comparison. Teacher knowledge (raw scores) was based on the selected thirty items and responses within a five choice format. Because many Towson State students have completed Special Education and/or School Law courses, a response bias may have been generated. Accuracy of responses on both the teacher description sheet and the inventory test was dependent on the honesty of each

participant. Lastly, the element of human error in scoring may have occurred.

Educational Implications

The impact of P.L. 94-142 on all educators; the lack of previous studies; and the findings of this research indicate the need for further investigation. Using the same instrument and demographic sheet, future assessments should be made on more diverse populations across the nation to evaluate the seven competency areas for strengths and weaknesses. Samples should include both regular and special education professionals at all levels of teaching, especially administrators and teachers no longer involved in formal graduate studies. In addition, all preservice teachers in teacher training programs should be assessed. Based on results, local education agencies and colleges should develop appropriate curriculum and/or literature to upgrade skills and knowledge. Through a comprehensive evaluation, the effectiveness of the state and local plans of implementation can be assessed from various perspectives. With the advent of school law and mainstreaming touching the lives of every professional educator, it is imperative that accurate and adequate knowledge be disseminated throughout the educational ranks.

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No. _____

How Much Do You Know About Special Education?

Select the best answer for each of the following questions.

1. Specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of handicapped students is defined as:

a) special education
b) least restrictive environment
c) Child Find
d) pupil placement
e) ARD Committee

2. The Law that assures a free and appropriate public education for all handicapped students is:

a) Level III
b) Child Find
c) P.L. 94-142
d) The Education For All Handicapped Children Act of 1975
e) both c and d

3. The MARC decree of 1975 addresses the right of the handicapped to be provided a free education between the ages of:

a) 6 and 18
b) 5 and 20
c) 16 and 18
d) 15 and 20
e) 0 and 21

4. A setting as similar as possible to that of non-handicapped peers is known as:

a) an IEP
b) special education
c) the ARD committee
d) a "least restrictive environment"
e) pupil placement

5. Handicapping conditions which adversely affect educational performance require:

a) MAUDD
b) Level III Services
c) some level of special education services
d) an appeal process
e) P.L. 94-142

6. In determining Special Education Services, the term ARD means:

a) Admission, Referral, and Dismissal
b) Admission, Review, and Determination
c) Admission, Referral and Determination
d) Arbitration, Referral, and Dismissal
e) Admission, Review, and Dismissal

7. Currently, most hearing impaired, speech impaired, and visually impaired students are educated in:

a) their homes
b) regular classrooms with appropriate modifications
c) special schools
d) resource rooms
e) state-owned institutions

8. The following can participate in an ARD team:

a) all of the persons listed below
b) parents
c) classroom teacher
e) school nurse

9. The term IEP means:

a) Implemented Educational Procedure
b) Individualized Evaluation Program
c) Individualized Education Program
d) Inventory Educational Program
e) Individualized Evaluation Procedure

10. The IEP must be reviewed:
    a) every month
    b) within 60 days of an initial placement
    c) within 30 days of an initial placement
    d) every year
    e) within 60 days of an initial placement and each year for updating

11. The following levels of services are given within the regular school environment:
    a) Level V
    b) Level III and Level IV
    c) Level VI
    d) a and b
    e) none of the above

12. The level of services for students in general education who need minimal supportive assistance is called:
    a) Level V
    b) Level IV
    c) Level III
    d) Level II
    e) Level I

13. A parent and child advocacy group for the developmentally disabled is:
    a) Child Find
    b) MAUDD
    c) IEP
    d) ARD
    e) P.L. 94-142

14. Before a child can be evaluated for or placed in special education services a _____ is required.
    a) parent signature
    b) medical evaluation
    c) battery of achievement tests
    d) personality test
    e) referral by the school principal

15. A parent has the right to:
    a) see his child's records
    b) deny the family doctor the privilege of seeing his child's records
    c) participate in ARD committees
    d) all of the above
    e) none of the above

16. A student can be referred for evaluation by:
    a) a teacher
    b) the student
    c) the parent
    d) the counselor
    e) all of the above

17. Tommy's reading skills are declining. You notice he is staring off in space periodically every day and decide to refer him for evaluation. You are participating in:
    a) the ARD Committee
    b) the IEP
    c) Child Find
    d) Special Education
    e) all of the above

18. Johnny has an IQ below 70 and has problems with everyday normal life situations. He has a handicapping condition classified as a:
    a) learning disability
    b) emotional disturbance
    c) mental retardation
    d) intellectual limitation
    e) health impairment

19. You have a student of normal intelligence but with sensory perception problems. You want him/her evaluated to determine his/her:

a) learning disability
b) visual impairment
c) intellectual limitation
d) hearing impairment
e) health impairment

20. The function and responsibility of the ARD Committee is to:

a) assess the student
b) develop an IEP
c) review pupil placement
d) dismiss from special education
e) all of the above

21. The components of valid assessments are:

a) the description of behaviors
b) the special education services
c) the criteria for eligibility
d) the signature of assessor
e) all of the above

22. Under the ARD process, when considering appropriate placement, it is necessary to consider the _____ of the student to the program.

a) mental attitude
b) transportation
c) success
d) appropriate attire
e) all of the above

23. All of the items below are components of an IEP <u>except</u>:

a) goals and short term objectives
b) special transportation
c) description of behaviors
d) participation in special and regular education
e) date and duration of services

24. The IEP must be implemented no more than ___ days after development.

a) 10
b) 20
c) 30
d) 60
e) 90

25. Level II services are therapeutic services given for _____ per day in local schools.

a) 1 hour
b) 2 hours
c) 3 hours
d) 4 hours
e) 5 hours

26. A 24 hour/day comprehensive program in a non-public residential school is defined as:

a) Level V Services
b) Level II Services
c) Level VI Services
d) Level IV Services
e) Level III Services

27. You have a student who will be out of school for 6-8 weeks with a broken leg. He will be referred for:

a) Level I Services
b) Child Find Services
c) ARD
d) Home and Hospital Services
e) Level V Services

28. Michael was recommended for a special school which is a comprehensive special setting for the entire school day. He will receive:

a) Level II Services
b) Level III Services
c) Level IV Services
d) Level V Services
e) Level VI Services

29. When a child has been referred for special education services, parents may participate in:

a) student testing sessions
b) all aspects of ARD committee
c) decisions concerning report card grades
d) none of the above
e) all of the above

30. Parents have the right to due process hearings in order to challenge:

a) diagnosis
b) evaluation of educational program provided
c) exclusion or exemption from school privileges of the child
d) none of the above
e) all of the above